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United Nations Forum on Forests
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Forests in a changing environment

Recommendations for addressing key challenges of forests in a changing environment

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

The purpose of the present report is to provide a comprehensive set of recommendations for the consideration of the United Nations Forum on Forests in order to assist it in addressing the closely interlinked challenges of the various components of the issue of forests in a changing environment, as envisaged in the multi-year programme of work for its eighth session.

* E/CN.18/2009/1.

** The delay in the issuance of the present report was due to the need for extended consultations.

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I. Introduction

1. The Secretary-General has submitted three reports for the consideration of the United Nations Forum on Forests at its eighth session on the following issues: (a) forests and climate change;[1] (b) reversing the loss of forest cover, preventing forest degradation in all types of forests and combating desertification, including in low forest cover countries;[2] and (c) forests and biodiversity conservation, including protected areas.[3] To support the discussions on these issues, the Forum secretariat prepared a note, "Forests in a changing environment: low forest cover countries, small island developing States and high and medium forest cover countries",[4] which elaborates on how these issues are inextricably linked and how they should be addressed in a coordinated, cross-sectoral manner within the framework of sustainable forest management.

2. The non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests, the first global agreement on the sustainable management of all types of forests, hereinafter referred to as the forest instrument, agreed upon at the seventh session of the Forum and adopted by the General Assembly in December 2007 (General Assembly resolution 62/98, annex), provides a policy and operational framework for Member States to address these three critical clusters of issues in a coordinated and coherent manner.

3. The forest instrument is an effective tool for integrating the issues of climate change, deforestation and forest degradation, desertification and biodiversity in a holistic and coordinated manner within the framework of sustainable forest management. To that end, national forest programmes or equivalent policies or strategies should play a fundamental role.

4. At the core of the forest instrument, in sections V and VI, are the policies and measures for achieving the global objectives on forests and sustainable forest management. The recommendations presented below are on how to achieve results in the implementation of the forest instrument in the areas of climate change, deforestation, forest degradation, desertification and biodiversity, with special emphasis on creating synergies among processes at the national, regional and international levels towards the realization of the results. Within this context, the following set of recommendations is made on the three issues to be discussed under agenda item 5, forests in a changing environment.

II. Recommended measures for Member States

5. Member States may wish to:

(a) Encourage the use of national forest programmes or their equivalents to integrate measures for addressing deforestation and forest degradation in national sustainable development strategies and programmes and review and revise them to interact more effectively with other sectoral plans, in particular those related to climate change, land degradation, desertification and biodiversity, including through enhancing collaboration and cooperation;

[1] E/CN.18/2009/4.
[2] E/CN.18/2009/5.
[3] E/CN.18/2009/6.
[4] E/CN.18/2009/7.

(b) Establish national coordination mechanisms comprised of the national focal points for the Forum, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa (UNCCD), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and other relevant stakeholders in order to address, in a coordinated and coherent manner, the aggregate impact of climate change, deforestation and forest degradation, desertification and biodiversity loss;

(c) Use the potential of the forest instrument to reinforce practical measures at the national level to integrate forests more closely with other policies and consider enhancing coordination between the Forum's national focal points and those of CBD, UNCCD and UNFCCC, as well as of other member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, in order to ensure consistency of actions with the forest instrument;

(d) Coordinate, as a priority, their national positions on issues of forests in a changing environment in the governing bodies of the member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, taking into account the critical importance of the governing bodies in supporting climate change objectives, and the need for Member States to infuse this collaborative approach into their negotiating positions on climate change;

(e) Encourage the development of national finance strategies for sustainable forest management in order to coordinate funding from different sectors and sources, with the support of the national coordinating mechanisms and in consultation with relevant ministries, in particular those responsible for finance and budget planning, bearing in mind that such strategies would contribute greatly to strengthening the implementation of national forest programmes and an effective, coordinated approach to addressing the aggregate impacts of climate change, deforestation and forest degradation, land degradation, including desertification, and biodiversity loss on forest ecosystems;

(f) Improve analytical and reporting capacities to better assess how sustainable forest management contributes to responding to climate change, combating desertification and the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity;

(g) Use national forest programmes or their equivalents to incorporate in broader national development policies and programmes the specific measures for achieving the global objectives on forests, which could include, if a country so wishes, setting of voluntary national goals or targets;

(h) Give priority, as appropriate, to reforestation, afforestation and the expansion of forest plantations in national development policies and programmes and national forest programmes or their equivalents in low forest cover countries and small island developing States, bearing in mind that additional financial resources need to be mobilized at all levels to assist these two groups of countries.

III. Recommended measures for the United Nations Forum on Forests

6. The Forum may wish to:

(a) Take advantage of its central role in the United Nations to promote sustainable forest management in global sustainable development and environmental agendas and, in this regard, provide guidance to the Secretary-General on how the Forum contributes to the United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries;

(b) Decide on a message to the fifteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to UNFCCC on the potential role of forests and sustainable forest management in mitigating and adapting to climate change within the context of the post-2012 Kyoto commitment period, including opportunities for closer cooperation and collaboration between the Forum and UNFCCC;

(c) Acknowledge the importance of the strategic framework for forests and climate change of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and call upon Member States, as members of the governing bodies of the member organizations of the Partnership, to support the implementation of the strategic framework;

(d) Decide to review, at its next session, relevant developments in the area of climate change, desertification and land degradation and biodiversity, as well as their implications on the overall themes of the ninth session of the Forum and consider initiating intersessional work in this regard;

(e) Consider initiating work on bioenergy and its effects on forests and sustainable forest management, which could be addressed as an emerging issue at the next session of the Forum;

(f) Address the impact of armed conflicts on forests as an underlying cause of deforestation and forest degradation, as well as the challenges of post-conflict rehabilitation in the future work of the Forum as an emerging issue;

(g) Invite the forest law enforcement and governance processes to review and consider the need to pay more attention to responding to the threats posed by climate change, with special attention given to the needs of high and medium forest cover countries, small island developing States and low forest cover countries;

(h) Recognize the important links between the International Year of Biodiversity (2010) and the International Year of Forests (2011), and call for close cooperation of the Forum and CBD secretariats in the organization and celebration of these events, and invite the Collaborative Partnership on Forests to actively support them;

(i) Continue to consider developments and trends in the forest sector in low forest cover countries, small island developing States and high and medium forest cover countries, taking into account their special circumstances and challenges, the framework of the assessment of progress and review of the global objectives on forests and of the forest instrument for the ninth session of the Forum in 2011 and the eleventh session of the Forum in 2015, respectively;

(j) Continue to support the global forest expert panels initiative of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and consider making more use of it as a scientific body for assisting the Forum in addressing special and emerging issues.

IV. Recommended measures for the Collaborative Partnership on Forests

7. The Forum may also wish to:

(a) Invite the Collaborative Partnership on Forests to assist countries, upon request, in developing policies and strategies to address in a coordinated and coherent manner the aggregate impact of deforestation and forest degradation, biodiversity loss, climate change and desertification within the framework of their national development programmes, including national forest programmes or their equivalent policies and strategies, and support capacity-building, including capacities for monitoring, reporting and analysis;

(b) Welcome the launching of the Partnership's strategic framework for forests and climate change as a coordinated forest-sector response to climate change and encourage its implementation as the basis for developing and strengthening the capacity of developing countries to respond to the threats of climate change through the application of mitigation and adaptation measures;

(c) Invite the Partnership to provide information on the aggregate impact of deforestation and forest degradation, desertification, loss of biodiversity and climate change on indigenous peoples and other local and forest-dependent communities to the ninth session of the Forum;

(d) Invite the Partnership to explore the possible impact of the food, fuel and financial crises on sustainable forest management and the achievement of the global objectives on forests and present its findings to the ninth session of the Forum.

V. Recommended measures for donors and international organizations

8. The Forum may also wish to:

(a) Invite donor countries, multilateral funding organizations and international organizations to increase funding for sustainable forest management;

(b) Call upon donor countries and international organizations to provide financial resources and promote technology transfer to developing countries, in particular low forest countries, small island developing States and small to medium-sized countries with high to medium forest cover, and to support their efforts to achieve the first global objective on forests on reversing the loss of forest cover worldwide and preventing forest degradation and the third global objective on increasing significantly the area of protected forests worldwide and other areas of sustainably managed forests.

VI. Recommended measures for enhancing cooperation with multilateral environmental agreements

9. The Forum may also wish to:

(a) Invite the Joint Liaison Group for the Rio Conventions (CBD, UNCCD and UNFCCC) to include the secretariat of the Forum in its work when forest-related issues are discussed;

(b) Encourage the secretariats of the Forum and UNCCD to explore possible areas of closer collaboration in implementing the forest instrument and the 10-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention to Combat Desertification (2008-2018);

(c) Invite relevant organizations to contribute to the valuation of the full range of goods and services provided by forests as a way to address the underlying causes of climate change deforestation and forest degradation, desertification and loss of biodiversity and to provide case studies to the Forum.

VII. Recommended measures for the secretariat of the Forum

10. The Forum may also wish to:

(a) Explore, in cooperation with members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, opportunities for cooperation with forest-related multilateral environmental agreements that are not part of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, in areas of common interest, where complementarity exists, in order to address climate change, deforestation and forest degradation, desertification and loss of biodiversity more effectively;

(b) Continue to work in close collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and other member organizations of the Partnership on the development of an appropriate set of new and existing indicators to support Member States in reporting to the Forum on the first and third global objectives on forests and related policies and measures of the forest instrument, bearing in mind that a major obstacle in assessing progress on preventing forest degradation and combating desertification is the absence of agreed measurable indicators and their regular monitoring at the global level, and also to request the secretariat and the Partnership to report back on progress achieved to the ninth session of the Forum;

(c) Follow up on CBD decision IX/5 on forest biodiversity, which calls for coordinated actions among the secretariats, and to report back on progress achieved to the ninth session of the Forum;

(d) Coordinate with the UNFCCC secretariat and other member organizations of the Partnership on joint initiatives to enhance synergy and complementarity between the UNFCCC and United Nations Forum on Forests processes;

(e) Collaborate with the Joint Liaison Group for the Rio Conventions on the important contribution of forest instrument to the achievement of their respective goals and objectives and on enhancing synergies in the area of forests;

(f) Prepare, in collaboration with members of the Partnership, other relevant multilateral environmental agreements that are not part of the Partnership and regional processes, an analysis of gaps or areas in the field of sustainable forest management that may not be adequately addressed by international forest-related agreements, and to report on the findings to the eleventh session of the Forum.